

## An Analysis of Flouting Maxim in *Anyone but You* (2023) Film

Diva Laili Ardelia<sup>1</sup>, Nita Maya Valiantien<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1,2</sup>Faculty of Cultural Sciences, Universitas Mulawarman

Email: [divaardelia4@gmail.com](mailto:divaardelia4@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

From a pragmatic perspective, meaning in interaction is not only conveyed through what is said but also through how conversational norms are strategically violated. This study examines the flouting of Grice's conversational maxims in the romantic comedy *Anyone but You*, focusing on the main characters, Bea and Ben. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach, the study analyzes instances of flouting across the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner, with particular attention to the strategies used to realize such non-observance in dialogue. The findings reveal that maxim flouting functions as a key pragmatic resource for expressing emotional complexity within the characters' love-hate relationship. Bea predominantly flouts the maxim of quantity through over-elaboration to emphasize persuasion and emotional stance, while Ben frequently flouts the maxim of relation by redirecting conversations and introducing seemingly irrelevant responses. Both characters also flout the maxims of quality and manner to generate humor and conceal underlying feelings. This study offers a stronger contribution by demonstrating that maxim flouting in romantic comedy is not merely a device for humor, as commonly found in prior research, but a systematic strategy for negotiating intimacy, conflict, and emotional ambiguity within relational dynamics. By situating pragmatic analysis within a love-hate narrative structure, this research extends existing studies and provides a more nuanced account of how implicature operates in cinematic dialogue.

**Keywords:** flouting maxim, romantic comedy, *Anyone but You*

### ABSTRAK

Komunikasi memainkan peran penting dalam interaksi sehari-hari, dan untuk memastikan pertukaran informasi yang efektif, terdapat aturan-aturan percakapan tertentu yang harus dipatuhi. Ketika aturan-aturan ini sengaja dilanggar, implikasi yang muncul sering kali mengungkapkan makna yang lebih dalam dari sekadar kata-kata yang diucapkan. Penelitian ini menganalisis *flouting maxim* yang dikemukakan oleh Grice dalam film komedi romantis *Anyone But You* (2023), dengan fokus pada dua tokoh utama, Bea dan Ben. Dengan menggunakan metode deskriptif kualitatif, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi dan mengkategorikan berbagai *flouting maxim* kuantitas, kualitas, relevansi, dan cara, serta bertujuan untuk mengetahui strategi yang digunakan oleh para tokoh dalam melanggar maksim tersebut. Data yang diperoleh dari dialog antar tokoh menunjukkan bahwa *flouting maxim* digunakan untuk menyampaikan kompleksitas emosional, terutama dalam konteks hubungan cinta-benci antara Bea dan Ben. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Bea sering melakukan *flouting maxim* kuantitas untuk menekankan argumen dan unsur persuasif, sementara Ben kerap melakukan *flouting maxim* relevansi dengan mengalihkan pembicaraan dan memberikan komentar yang tidak berhubungan. Kedua karakter juga menggunakan *flouting maxim* kualitas dengan cara untuk menciptakan humor, menyembunyikan perasaan yang sebenarnya. Studi ini menekankan bahwa strategi linguistik semacam ini memperkuat narasi dan pengembangan karakter, serta memberikan kontribusi terhadap pemahaman yang lebih mendalam tentang fenomena pragmatik dalam dialog film. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga memiliki perbedaan dari studi sebelumnya dengan menerapkan teori *flouting maxim* pada genre komedi romantis dengan dinamika karakter yang penuh emosi

**Kata kunci:** flouting maxim, romantic comedy, *Anyone but You*

## A. INTRODUCTION

Language, from a pragmatic perspective, functions as a medium through which meaning is negotiated in context, enabling individuals to build relationships and sustain social interaction. Rather than relying solely on vocabulary and grammatical competence, effective communication depends on the ability to interpret utterances in relation to contextual variables such as speaker intention, shared knowledge, and cultural norms (Nasution & Tambunan, 2022). Within this framework, context is not merely supportive but constitutive of meaning, guiding interlocutors in assigning appropriate interpretations to linguistic expressions. However, because meaning is often implicit and context-dependent, communication remains susceptible to ambiguity and misunderstanding, particularly when interlocutors draw on different assumptions or background knowledge (Kika, 2021).

To address such complexities, Grice (1975) proposed the Cooperative Principle, which outlines four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner— that serve as guidelines for achieving effective communication. While these maxims encourage speakers to be informative, truthful, relevant, and clear, they are often deliberately flouted to achieve specific communicative effects. Flouting maxims is a pragmatic strategy that may involve irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, understatement, or metaphor, allowing speakers to convey implicit meanings beyond literal interpretation (Cutting, 2002). Prior studies consistently demonstrate that the flouting of conversational maxims is a recurrent pragmatic strategy in fictional dialogue. Across different genres, such as the sitcom *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* (Rosa, 2020) and the animated film *Finding Dory* (Natasya, Yuhendra, & Sari, 2019), maxim flouting is systematically employed to generate humour, conceal or soften emotional expression, and heighten dramatic tension. This convergence of findings suggests that pragmatic non-observance plays a functional and context-sensitive role in shaping audience interpretation and narrative impact.

The present study situates itself within this context by focusing on the romantic comedy *Anyone but You* (2023), which offers a rich example of maxim flouting through its witty and sarcastic dialogue. The film depicts the turbulent love-hate relationship between its protagonists, Bea and Ben, whose interactions frequently rely on indirectness and double meanings. These conversational patterns align with common pragmatic strategies in romantic comedies, where flouting maxims enhances both comedic timing and emotional depth. However, despite the prevalence of maxim flouting as a pragmatic strategy in film discourse, existing studies have largely focused on animated films, sitcoms, or institutional talk, with limited attention to contemporary romantic comedies as sites of pragmatic analysis. In particular, *Anyone but You* has not been examined through the lens of the Cooperative Principle, especially in relation to how maxim flouting operates within a love-hate relational dynamic. As a result, there remains a gap in understanding how implicature is strategically constructed to negotiate intimacy, conflict, and emotional ambiguity in this specific genre and narrative context. Given this gap, this study aims to address the following research question: how do the main characters in *Anyone but You* flout Gricean conversational maxims in their interactions?

Accordingly, the objectives are to (1) identify and classify the types of conversational maxims that are flouted, and (2) analyze the pragmatic strategies through which such flouting is realized in the dialogue. Through these objectives, the study seeks to contribute to a more

nuanced understanding of how pragmatic meaning is constructed and negotiated in film discourse.

## **B. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Theoretical Framework**

#### **a. Pragmatics**

Pragmatics is concerned with the study of language meaning in relation to the speaker, the listener, and the context of communication (Crystal, 1995). It examines how intentions are conveyed and how utterances are influenced by the circumstances in which they occur. According to Yule (1996), pragmatics specifically focuses on contextual meaning and how speakers adapt their language to the audience, the situation, and the setting. The central aim of pragmatics is to explain how language functions in real-life interactions.

#### **b. Cooperative Principle**

Grice (1975) introduced the Cooperative Principle, which holds that speakers are expected to make contributions that are truthful, relevant, informative, and clear to maintain effective communication. This principle is operationalised through four conversational maxims: quantity, quality, relevance, and manner.

1. Maxim of Quantity

Speakers are expected to provide the necessary amount of information—neither too little nor too much—for effective understanding (Grice, 1975).

2. Maxim of Quality

This maxim requires speakers to provide information that is truthful and supported by evidence, avoiding statements that are false or misleading (Kurniati & Hanidar, 2018).

3. Maxim of Relevance

Contributions should remain relevant to the ongoing discussion to maintain coherence and mutual understanding (Sinaga & Handayani, 2021).

4. Maxim of Manner

Speakers should express their ideas clearly and avoid ambiguity, ensuring orderly communication (Sinaga & Handayani, 2021).

#### **c. Flouting Maxim and Strategies**

Flouting occurs when a speaker deliberately disobeys a maxim to imply an additional meaning, often relying on the listener's ability to infer the intended message (Grice, 1975). This does not necessarily indicate uncooperativeness but rather serves communicative purposes such as humour, criticism, or emphasis (Wahyuni et al., 2019). Cutting (2002) identifies four types of flouting:

1. Flouting Maxim of Quantity

Providing either more or less information than required, prompting the listener to infer additional meaning.

2. Flouting Maxim of Quality

Using non-literal expressions such as hyperbole, metaphor, irony, banter, or sarcasm to convey implied messages (Cutting, 2002).

3. Flouting Maxim of Relevance

Giving responses that are irrelevant or changing the topic to convey hidden meanings.

4. Flouting Maxim of Manner

Using ambiguity, vagueness, or obscurity to indirectly communicate a message.

## C. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to analyse the phenomenon of flouting maxims in the film *Anyone but You* (2023). Qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena in their natural context by exploring participants' experiences and perspectives rather than relying on numerical data (Ugwu & Eze, 2023). Therefore, a qualitative descriptive approach is suitable for this study because the research focuses on interpreting meaning, context, and pragmatic function rather than measuring frequency or testing statistical relationships. The analysis of flouting Grice's conversational maxims requires close examination of dialogue, including how utterances deviate from cooperative norms and how such deviations generate implicature within specific interactional contexts. Specifically, the descriptive approach aimed to provide a clear and detailed explanation of the utterances and conversational behaviours of the main characters (Lambert, 2012). The data were obtained from the film's dialogues, which were collected by repeatedly watching the 104-minute movie and transcribing relevant utterances that demonstrated instances of maxim flouting. The researcher served as the primary instrument, selecting, organising, and analysing the data systematically (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). The data collection process involved direct observation (Kawulich, 2012), note-taking, and classifying the dialogues based on the types of maxims being flouted. Data analysis in this study follows the interactive model proposed by Matthew B. Miles and A. Michael Huberman (2014), which involves three interrelated stages. First, during the data reduction stage, the researcher systematically selected and categorized utterances from *Anyone but You* that contained instances of maxim flouting, and coded them according to the types of maxims and pragmatic strategies involved. Second, in the data display stage, the reduced data were organized into structured formats (e.g., tables or excerpts) to clearly show patterns of flouting and facilitate comparison between the characters. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researcher interpreted the implicatures and communicative functions of the identified utterances, linking these findings directly to the research questions on how and why the characters flout conversational maxims.

## D. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter explains the flouting of maxim of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner as found in the *Anyone but You* (2023) film.

### 1. Findings

This research aims to identify which conversational maxims are flouted by the main characters in the film *Anyone but You* (2023) and to examine the strategies they employ when flouting these maxims. After analyzing the dialogues, it was found that both Bea and Ben frequently flout several conversational maxims proposed by Grice, namely the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner.

## a. Flouting Maxim of Quantity

In the following dialogue, Ben explained to Bea how their fake relationship should have appeared to make his ex, Margaret, jealous. He wanted Margaret to believe that he and Bea were “together,” but not “too together,” so that Margaret would still see an opportunity to pursue him. Ben repeatedly used variations of the word “together”—such as “together-together,” “situationally together,” and “our togetherness”—which made his explanation overly detailed and somewhat confusing.

BEN : It’s never complicated. What, he cheated on you? drug problem? Did you catch him measuring his dick with a ruler app?

BEA : We never fought.

BEN : Isn’t that a good thing?

BEA : It was just comfortable. And he’s a great guy, which means there’s no one out there for me because I had the best one. **I couldn’t even tell him I quit law school. And I have no idea what I’m gonna do with my life. If we’re gonna get eaten by sharks, I had to tell somebody.** (Gluck, 2023, 01:04:06)

Ben’s flouting of the maxim of quantity is shown when he gives more information than necessary instead of a brief explanation in *Anyone but You*. Instead of simply saying that their fake relationship should look casual but believable, he over-explains and repeats his point. He likely does this to manage the situation. His excessive explanation suggests that he is not entirely confident, even though he tries to appear in control. The implicature created is that his words carry more than their literal meaning. By saying too much, he indirectly shows insecurity or concern about how the relationship is perceived. This flouting mainly creates humour because his explanation feels unnecessarily long for a simple idea. At the same time, it can add slight tension or hint at deeper feelings, making the interaction more engaging.

## b. Flouting Maxim of Quality

The following dialogue happened when Carol executed her plan to bring Bea and Ben closer by asking them to swim and retrieve Roger’s sunglasses from the sailboat. Although Bea and Ben were aware that their family and friends were trying to set them up, they still followed Carol’s request. While swimming, Bea noticed that Ben was not a good swimmer despite his muscular appearance. She then teased him and questioned why he struggled to swim despite looking physically strong.

BEA : Why are you so out of shape? **You have like a 10 pack.**

BEN : I’m not out of shape. I bench to 295, 300 once. I just don’t do cardio. (Gluck, 2023,00:35:21)

This dialogue illustrated Bea’s **flouting of the maxim of quality** through the use of **hyperbole**. Bea exaggerated when she said, “*You have like a 10 pack,*” even though Ben only had a six-pack or well-defined muscles. The exaggeration was not intended to deceive but to express her surprise and confusion. By flouting the maxim, Bea playfully mocked Ben, which added humour and highlighted the playful tension between them.

### c. Flouting Maxim of Relevance

The next dialogue between Bea and Ben happen they were playing charades, when Ben cheated by using props, prompting Bea to call him a cheater.

BEN : What is this?

BEA : Wait, no props.

BEN : No one cares, no one can see us.

BEA : Cheaters are shocking.

BEN : **Says the woman who cheated on her fiancé.** (Gluck, 2023,00:28:46)

In this scene, Bea and Ben were playing charades when Ben cheated by using props, prompting Bea to call him a cheater. This dialogue showed Ben's **flouting maxim of relevance** by shifting the topic from cheating in the game to cheating in a relationship. Instead of responding within the game's context, he replied, "*Says the woman who cheated on her fiancé.*" His unrelated response redirected the conversation to Bea's personal life. By introducing an unrelated and more sensitive topic, Ben intentionally diverted attention from his own actions to highlight Bea's past mistake. This shift not only created tension but also emphasized the underlying love-hate dynamic between the two characters. Therefore, Ben clearly flouted the maxim of relation.

### d. Flouting Maxim of Manner

Bea and Ben, in the following dialogue, planned to convince everyone that they were genuinely dating. Bea suggested reenacting the iconic "*I'm flying*" scene from *Titanic* to create a romantic moment that would capture everyone's attention. While Bea was excited, Ben was initially hesitant but eventually agreed, believing the act would make their fake relationship more convincing.

BEN: **Titanic me.**

BEN: No, that is so lame. (Gluck, 2023,00:59:19)

This dialogue illustrated Bea's **flouting of the maxim of manner** by using an ambiguous statement. She said, "*Titanic me,*" which was vague and unclear because it did not specify the exact action she wanted Ben to perform. However, Ben understood her intention due to their shared knowledge of the movie scene. His immediate response, "*No, that is so lame,*" showed he interpreted her meaning correctly. Although her words were unclear, mutual understanding and cultural references allowed effective communication. The playful and vague language also reflected their growing connection and added humour to their interaction.

The findings directly support the research objective by illustrating how a specific type of maxim flouting (quantity) is realized through over-explanation as a pragmatic strategy, and how it contributes to meaning-making and character development in film dialogue.

## 2. Discussion

The findings revealed that Bea and Ben frequently flouted Grice's conversational maxims in *Anyone but You* (2023), reflecting the complexity of their love-hate relationship. Their

tendency to flout maxims served as a strategy to navigate emotions, maintain witty banter, and create comedic and dramatic tension throughout the narrative.

Ben most often flouted the **maxim of relevance** by giving responses that appeared off-topic but were intentionally used to deflect, provoke, or redirect emotionally charged conversations. This pattern reflected his tendency to mask vulnerability and avoid directly addressing his feelings, while also enriching the dialogue with humor and tension.

Bea, on the other hand, frequently flouted the **maxim of quantity** by providing excessive information or dramatic elaborations to emphasize her points. Her over-explanations showcased her persuasive personality, strategic thinking, and emotional expression, particularly when navigating her relationship with Ben.

When compared with previous studies, the results showed similarities and distinctions. Like Marlisa and Hidayat's (2020) findings on *Good Morning America*, Bea's over-explanations aligned with patterns of flouting the maxim of quantity, while Ben's tendency to redirect conversations mirrored findings from Natasya, Yuhendra, and Sari's (2019) study on *Finding Dory*. However, this research uniquely highlighted how flouting conversational maxims in a romantic comedy setting built tension, humor, and emotional depth within a love-hate dynamic.

Overall, Bea and Ben's intentional flouting of maxims revealed their personalities, emotional struggles, and evolving connection. These strategies enriched the narrative by adding complexity, humor, and relatability, enhancing audience engagement with their interactions. The film shows that flouting becomes a mechanism for constructing intimacy through conflict, which includes humor, tension, and emotional vulnerability within the same exchanges. This extends prior research by showing that pragmatic violations through flouting of maxims can simultaneously perform multiple interpersonal functions, particularly in narratives centered on ambivalent relationships

## D. CONCLUSION

The analysis of flouting maxims in the film *Anyone but You* (2023) showed that the main characters, Bea and Ben, frequently flouted Grice's cooperative principles to enhance humor, tension, and emotional depth. The study revealed instances of flouting the maxims of quantity, quality, relevance, and manner, each serving different functions in their interactions.

Ben primarily flouts the maxim of relevance by giving off-topic responses to deflect emotional vulnerability and steer conversations, whereas Bea tends to flout the maxim of quantity through over-elaboration to reinforce her points. Both characters also deviate from the maxims of quality and manner, using exaggeration and ambiguity to generate humor and display their shared wit. These patterns reflected their love-hate dynamic, where playful banter and indirect communication revealed their personalities, emotional conflicts, and evolving relationships. The findings also aligned with previous studies on flouting maxims in various contexts but offered a fresh perspective by examining their role in a romantic comedy with a love-hate relationship.

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